No regrets on swapping UAE for Pakistan, says Usman

RAWALPINDI: Usman Khan knew he had to grab the chance on offer with both hands. He did, and with an unbeaten 37 against Zimbabwe, he saw Pakistan through to victory in the Twenty20 tri-nation series opener at the Pindi Cricket Stadium on Tuesday night.

The wicket-keeper/batter, who had chosen to represent United Arab Emirates in international cricket back in 2021 before switching allegiance back to his homeland last year after catching the eye in the Pakistan Super League, hadn't made much of an impression on his return to the team for the series against South Africa at the end of last month.

In the first match — the only game of the series he got a chance to show the work he'd done on himself during his time away — Usman, who had been away from the national team fold since April, made 12 as Pakistan suffered a heavy defeat.

Pakistan would eventually bounce back to claim the series but as the team continues to finalise its shape for the next year's Twenty20 World Cup, Usman knew he had to make it count against Zimbabwe.

Pakistan had slipped to 54-4 in their pursuit of 148 when Usman joined Fakhar Zaman (44) at the crease and provided the ideal foil in a 61-run partnership that set Pakistan on their way.

Shunted out of Pakistan's central contracts list for this year, Usman was asked about whether he regretted swapping UAE for Pakistan when he appeared for the post-match press conference.

"No, I don't think it was a mistake because it's everyone's dream to play for their home country, so if I'm getting the chance to play [for Pakistan] then naturally I will accept it," Usman, who would've qualified to represent UAE this year had he stuck to his initial decision, told reporters.

"You know that in the UAE, no matter how much time you spend there, you will only be an associate player since it isn't a Test nation. Obviously when you play here and perform, now in the age of social media your performance is for all to see, and likewise those who work hard are rewarded."

Usman informed has been doing that hard work on the domestic circuit.

"I've played two first-class matches this month in the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy as well as featuring in other domestic tournaments," he said. "More importantly, I've worked on my fitness and my coaches have also worked hard … obviously when your fitness is better, keeping wickets will also get better.

"As a batter, I'm trying to spend more time on the wicket, building partnerships and trying to lengthen my play. In the past, I used to try and come out blazing. But now, I'm trying to build my innings. I've just worked hard [on that]. And as you saw [today], I was told by the coach to stay on the wicket and finish the chase."

With the T20 World Cup on the horizon, the 30-year-old was asked about his chances of making the final squad.

"I don't know but as you saw today, I hope I can continue like this," he said. "Obviously if I get the chance I'll do my best to perform and then make the team … you don't think too far ahead about whether you'll make the team or not. The focus is on performing in the moment and giving it my all."—Agencies

NEW ZEALAND captain Mitchell Santner plays a shot during the second One-day International against West Indies at the McLean Park on Wednesday.—AFP

Santner fireworks give NZ ODI series win over West Indies

NAPIER: Captain Mitchell Santner delivered late fireworks with the bat as New Zealand beat the West Indies by five wickets in the second one-day international on Wednesday to win the series.

Santner smashed 34 not out off 15 balls to carry the hosts home at 248-5 with three deliveries to spare after the tourists posted 247-9.

The match at Napier's McLean Park was reduced by rain to 34 overs each after a three-hour wait to start.

West Indies captain Shai Hope unfurled a brilliant 109 off 69 balls to give them a chance of squaring the three-match series after the hosts won the opener by seven runs in Christchurch on Sunday.

But some wayward late bowling opened the door for New Zealand, who have now won 11 successive ODI bilateral series at home dating back to 2019.

The result was hanging in the balance with three overs remaining, when the home side still required 40 runs to win.

Santner then struck the otherwise impressive seamer Matthew Forde for two fours and a six in successive balls.

He swatted a six and four from the following over bowled by Shamar Springer to swing the advantage firmly to New Zealand.

Seasoned all-rounder Santner sealed victory with a cover drive off Jayden Seales and said he always felt the target could be hauled in.

"I thought 247 was a good score. They batted really well but it's one of those grounds where, if you get a good start, you can cash in at the back end," he said. "Obviously thrilled with the win."

Tom Latham was left not out on 39 while the chase was set up nicely by half-centuries to Devon Conway (90) and Rachin Ravindra (56) before New Zealand lost momentum through the middle stages.

Earlier, Hope produced his 19th ton in the format, finishing with 13 fours and four sixes as he became the seventh West Indies player to go past 6,000 ODI runs.

He is the second fastest to reach the milestone — in 147 matches — behind Viv Richards.

Hope felt bittersweet about his innings.

"It's always good to try to give the team the best chance of winning the game," he said. "But I always look at it from within, and there's more I could have done. I honestly thought 247 was enough, but clearly it wasn't."

The tourists pummelled 111 off the last nine overs, with lower-order batsmen Justin Greaves, Romario Shepherd and Forde all passing 20 to provide support for Hope.

Nathan Smith bagged late wickets for New Zealand to record career-best figures of 4-42 while fellow seamer Kyle Jamieson took 3-44.

Game three is in Hamilton on Saturday.—AFP

Scoreboard

WEST INDIES:		NEW ZEALAND:	
J. Campbell c Tickner b Jamieson	4	D. Conway c Chase b Springer	90
A. Auguste c Jamieson b Smith	22	R. Ravindra c Chase b Greaves	56
K. Carty c Chapman b Jamieson	7	W. Young c Rutherford b Chase	11
S. Hope not out	109	M. Chapman c Greaves b Seales	0
S. Rutherford c Conway b Santner	13	T. Latham not out	39
R. Chase b Smith	2	M. Bracewell lbw Forde	11
J. Greaves c Bracewell b Smith	22	M. Santner not out	34
R. Shepherd c Henry b Tickner	22	EXTRAS (LB-1, NB-1, W-5)	7
M. Forde c Young b Smith	21	TOTAL (for five wickets, 33.3 overs)	248
S. Springer c Young b Jamieson	6	FALL OF WICKETS: 1-106 (Ravindra), 2-135 (Young), 3-136 (Chapman), 4-166 (Conway), 5-194 (Bracewell)	
J. Seales not out	1	DID NOT BAT: K. Jamieson, M. Henry, B. Tickner, N. Smith	
EXTRAS (LB-3, NB-1, W-14)	18	BOWLING: Forde 7-1-42-1 (1w); Seales 6.3-0-51-1 (2w, 1nb); Shepherd 3-0-17-0; Greaves 4-0-35-1; Chase 7-0-44-1; Springer 6-0-58-1 (2w)	
TOTAL (for nine wickets, 34 overs)	247	RESULT: New Zealand won by five wickets.	
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-15 (Campbell), 2-38 (Carty), 3-62 (Auguste), 4-83 (Rutherford), 5-86 (Chase), 6-130 (Greaves), 7-177 (Shepherd), 8-220 (Forde), 9-235 (Springer)		PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH: Shai Hope	
BOWLING: Henry 7-1-62-0; Jamieson 7-2-44-3 (2w); Tickner 6-0-61-1 (2w); Smith 7-0-42-4 (1w, 1nb); Santner 7-0-35-1 (1w)		SERIES: New Zealand lead three-match series 2-0.	

'Hosting ATP Challenger Tour could be a game changer for Pakistan'

By Kashif Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: Insisting that holding the ATP Challenger Tour for the very first time later this month is a great success of the country, Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) president Asiam-ul-Haq on Wednesday said that the contest could be a game changer noting that three local wildcard entrants will feature in the main round.

Pakistan will be hosting the ATP Challenger at the PTF Complex in Islamabad from Nov 24-30.

Players from different countries will be seen in action with main draw containing 24 contestants.

Sweden's Elias Ymer, who is world number 169, is the event's top seed followed by second seed Britain's Jay Clarke (213) and Saba Purtseladze (290) of Georgia, seeded third.

There are six players in the international ranking bracket of 400-600 who will be vying for victory in Islamabad.

A number of lower-ranked players will also be seen in action including Italy's Simone Agostini, the world number 2138.

Pakistani has given wildcards to three local players in the main draw — Muzammil Murtaza, Mohammad Shoaib and veteran Aqeel Khan.

"A match referee from Russia and a supervisor [from Canada] have arrived in Islamabad while the foreign players will start arriving from Thursday [today]," said Aisam while talking to *Dawn*.

Answering a query about lower-ranked entries of international players in the Islamabad event, the PTF chief said that Pakistan's primary focus was hosting this mega event for the first time.

"Our focus is to hold this event successfully, this is [only] beginning. Next year, we will hold another event with bigger prize money, which will attract higher-ranked players," Aisam said.

"Our local wild card entrants have a great chance to improve their [international] ranking. All of them are experienced players who have displayed impressive performances over the years in various national and international events."

Federer to be inducted into Hall of Fame

NEWPORT: Roger Federer will be inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in an induction celebration set for August 2026 in Newport, Rhode Island, the ITHF said on Wednesday.

Federer won 20 Grand Slams, the first male player to reach the benchmark, and clinched 103 career titles before retiring in 2022. He held the world number one ranking for a record 237 weeks straight between 2004 and 2008.

"It's a tremendous honor to be inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame and to stand alongside so many of the game's great champions... to be recognised in this way by the sport and by my peers is deeply humbling," Federer said in a statement shared by the ITHF.

The Swiss held the top spot in the ATP rankings for 310 weeks during his career, and had long rivalries with Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, the two others in the "big three" of men's tennis at the time.

"Throughout my career, I've always valued the history of tennis and the example set by those who came before me... I look forward to visiting Newport next August to celebrate this special moment with the tennis community," the 44-year-old added. —Reuters

Asjad settles for silver at IBSF World Cup after defeat to Chandler

MUSCAT: Pakistan's Asjad Iqbal's quest for the IBSF World Snooker Cup title concluded with a silver medal after he succumbed to a 5-2 defeat against England's Harvey Chandler in the final held at the Oman Entertainment and Sports Hub on Wednesday.

The English cueist established dominance early, capitalising on a sloppy break from Asjad in the first frame to compile runs of 23 and 52, sealing it comfortably 83-0.

Asjad — who defeated Nicolas Mortreux of France 5-2 earlier in the semi-final — demonstrated resilience by striking back in the second frame.

After a cautious start, he ignited a fightback with a brilliant long pot, building a 37-point lead. A further break of 29 seemed to put him in command, but a missed easy red offered Chandler a lifeline.

The Englishman himself later missed a straightforward black, conceding the frame in frustration as Asjad levelled the match.

The contest's momentum continued to swing. Chandler — who follows English club Manchester United — reclaimed the lead by taking a tightly contested third frame.

The match then tilted decisively in the Englishman's favour in the fourth.

A poor break from Asjad — who won the bronze in last edition of the tournament — granted Chandler an opening and while the Pakistani reduced the deficit to two points, a miss on red proved costly.

Chandler pounced with a magnificent 67-clearance to go 3-1 ahead.

Asjad's challenges compounded immediately after as he bizarrely conceded the fourth frame 16-8. Following two initial fouls and a fumbled chance, his frustration boiled over, leading him to displace the balls with his cue and concede.

Displaying composure, Asjad — hailing from Sargodha — regrouped to clinch the fifth frame 86-3, fuelled by a focused break of 54, narrowing Chandler's lead to 3-2.

However, the Pakistani cueist could not sustain the comeback. The sixth frame evolved into a seesaw battle.

The 34-year-old Asjad crafted a 28-point break but again missed a critical shot into the corner pocket. Chandler seemed poised to secure the frame before a missed red offered a final twist.

Asjad potted the remaining reds, but a subsequent safety battle went Chandler's way and he eventually closed the frame 59-37 to move one frame from the title.

In the seventh frame, another errant break from Asjad handed Chandler the initiative.

The Englishman built a substantial lead, and despite a brief 15-point response from Asjad, Chandler's advantage grew to 55 points.

Needing snookers, Asjad conceded the frame and the match after a pumped up Chandler missed an inconsequential shot on red, handing the Englishman his maiden World Cup title. —Agencies

Injured Gill to travel for second SA Test

NEW DELHI: Indian captain Shubman Gill will travel to Guwahati, where a decision on his involvement in the second Test against South Africa will be made as the batter continues to recover from a neck injury, India's cricket board (BCCI) said on Wednesday.

Gill retired hurt with a neck injury in the first innings after playing only three balls and did not return for the rest of the match as India lost by 30 runs.

The batter was kept under observation in a hospital and was discharged after a day.

"Shubman has been responding well to the medical treatment provided and will travel to Guwahati with the team on 19th November 2025," the BCCI said in a statement.

"He will continue to be monitored by the BCCI medical team and a decision on his participation in the second test will be taken accordingly." Vice-captain Rishabh Pant will lead the hosts in case Gill remains absent for the second test which starts on Saturday in Guwahati.

India and South Africa will then face off in three ODIs and five T20 Internationals between Nov 30 and Dec 19.—Reuters

England keep options open as Stokes tells team 'don't be afraid'

PERTH: Captain Ben Stokes told England not to be afraid of Australia as selectors kept their options open Wednesday by naming off-spinner Shoaib Bashir in a 12-man squad for the first Test.

Four frontline pace bowlers were also included for the Ashes opener in Perth on Friday — Mark Wood, Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson and Brydon Carse, who was preferred to Josh Tongue.

Ollie Pope, as expected, kept his place at number three ahead of Jacob Bethell.

Veteran pace ace Wood unleashed a fiery spell in the nets on Tuesday after an injury scare last week to prove his fitness, with selectors likely waiting until the last minute to make a call on whether he plays.

But with Perth Stadium head curator Isaac McDonald predicting a typically fast and bouncy wicket, it would favour England opting for an all-out speed blitz.

Should that be the call, Stokes would offer support and Joe Root a part-time spin option.

"Jofra and Woody are amazing bowlers and they'll be huge for us this series," Atkinson told reporters, adding that he was happy to play a support role. "It's been like that a bit throughout my career so far, sort of in the background, and I don't mind at all."

Wood, Root, Stokes, Pope and opener Zak Crawley are the only players in the squad to have experienced Ashes cricket in Australia before.

It raises the prospect of some of the newcomers being overawed by the occasion.

Stokes said he had emphasised how big the series was and they should embrace it.

"I think if we were to come out and sort of not accept that and go, 'Oh nah, it's just another series', then we'd only be lying to ourselves and lying to the fact of what the series is," he told Sky Sports before the squad was announced.

"Facing what that feels like, looking it in the eyes, taking it on and not being afraid of the challenge that we have ahead of us," he added of his advice to the novices.

England have not won a series in Australia since 2010-11. Since then they have lost 13 Tests and drawn two Down Under.

Atkinson said not having played in Australia could actually work in his favour.

"So there are no scars for me. For some others, I wouldn't speak for them, but history would say it's probably a good thing," he said.

Australia head into the opening Test on the backfoot with pace spearheads Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood both out injured, leaving 100-Test veteran Mitchell Starc to shoulder a major burden.

He will be joined by fellow quick Scott Boland and spin king Nathan Lyon, with seamer Brendan Doggett likely to be handed a debut ahead of Michael Neser.

"Sadly, injuries in fast bowling happen," Starc said. "But good to see the depth in the squad. We know what Scotty Boland can do, 'Doggie's' coming off a hot streak at the moment and 'Nes' has been around for a while."

PERTH: England coach Brendon McCullum (C) addresses the players before a practice session at the Optus Stadium on Wednesday.—AFP

England squad: Ben Stokes (captain) Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Shoaib Bashir, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jamie Smith, Mark Wood.—AFP